



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### **Q: HOW DID THIS GROUP COME INTO EXISTENCE? WHAT DO YOU WORK ON?**

**A:** Over the summer of 2020, three of our parent leaders-- Meredith W. Dodson, Kate Levitt, and Laura Padilla-- formed a workgroup with a handful of other concerned parents to meet and brainstorm creative solutions to address the unmet learning and well-being needs of the most vulnerable SFUSD families who were hit hardest by the COVID-19 pandemic.

As they met with CBOs, community members, families, and funders, and parent groups like PPS-SF, SFUSD PAC, YMCA, Beacon, and school leaders from some of the highest need schools like Sanchez ES, El Dorado ES, and Visitacion Valley ES, they came up with a list of needs far greater than they could solve on their own, and they found the “I’m not feeling heard” message from families concerning.

Equally voiced was a frustration with the vacuum of information and transparency from the Board of Education and SFUSD in a time of great crisis and urgency. It was clear that there was a need for stronger and more inclusive family engagement processes across the district and a means of elevating families as powerful stakeholders in public school education in San Francisco. So they began to build the family collective to reach more people, listen, and advocate for the most pressing needs. All organizing has been done entirely on a volunteer basis by parents, caregivers, and community members interested in this work.

In just a few months, the group grew from 100 parents to more than 1,400 as of February 2021, which represents more perspectives and ideas and spans the city, crossing racial and socioeconomic lines. We have members from over 60 schools in SFUSD, including early childhood education, elementary, middle, and high schools. Advocacy for the safe reopening of our schools and an urgent call for transparency from SFUSD became added to our priorities in fall 2020, in response to concerns from many of the members in our group.

We also work on other solutions, such as outdoor education plans, how families can help improve distance learning, equitable fundraising across school sites, and advocating for wrap-around holistic supports for students. We have organized and held several online events, including a town hall with doctors on COVID-19 and safe schools, how to develop outdoor learning programs, and a discussion with state senators and assembly members about the budget and leadership on the reopening process.

Decreasing the Distance is a collective of parents and caregivers of SFUSD students who are committed to supporting one another and advocating for effective, equitable solutions during the COVID-19 education crisis and beyond.

**[www.decreasingthedistance.org](http://www.decreasingthedistance.org)**

## **Q: HOW DO I JOIN AND WHAT DOES BEING A MEMBER OF DTD MEAN?**

**A: To join Decreasing the Distance, we recommend you do the following:**

1. Being a DtD member means that you are in alignment with our mission to advocate for effective equitable education solutions for SFUSD families.
2. Fill out this [member form](#)
3. Sign up for an information source-- we have multiple options: our [newsletter](#), our [Facebook group](#) which provides a forum to members to discuss topics relevant to what we're working on. If you're not on Facebook, you can also [follow us on Twitter](#). Finally, for our non-English speaking families, we also have a group through WhatsApp (Spanish) and WeChat (Chinese). We will reach out to you to invite you to those channels if you note a language other than English on the member form.

## **Q: WHO ARE THE OTHER MEMBERS AND HOW DO I MEET THEM?**

**A:** We have members from across the city and from over 50 SFUSD elementary, middle, and high schools. We strive to reach a diverse representation of families similar to the composition of the SFUSD student/family population. The best way to “meet” other members is through our social media channels (Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, and WeChat). While our Facebook group may be the most visible and active forum, our membership and outreach is comprised of many people who choose not to engage on that platform. We encourage members to connect within their own school communities. We occasionally have pandemic-friendly events for our members over Zoom.

## **Q: WHEN AND HOW DO YOU DECIDE ON PRIORITIES TO WORK ON?**

**A:** DtD's executive leadership team consists of five individuals who are all SFUSD parents and represent parents who work across sectors and communities. Through their collective skills, knowledge, and networks they make consensus-based decisions and drives DtD's actions and strategies. We also have a group of 20-30 active lead members who are all parents and volunteer anywhere from 1-10 hours/week to support the work and contribute ideas regularly. Our parents bring important and diverse perspectives, and some are also educators, physicians, scientists, policy advisors, legislators, journalists, and more. We are committed to a community-informed and equity-centered approach to providing and increasing just inclusion that enables all students and their families to contribute and thrive. We regularly meet with CBOs, PACs, community leaders, and parents from different communities across San Francisco to learn how families are struggling the most and what they need-- related to SFUSD/school supports-- to thrive. We also use our Facebook group and other social media channels to reach families, learn about their priorities, and share information with them.

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**Q: DO YOU CHARGE A FEE TO JOIN?**

A: No.

**Q: WHERE DOES YOUR FUNDING COME FROM?**

A: We are not funded and have not received any financial compensation or support for our work. DtD is powered by a fierce and committed team of parent volunteers, most of whom are also working full-time jobs, juggling the demands of distance learning, and navigating this time of crisis as best we can.

**Q: ARE YOU A LOBBYING ORGANIZATION?**

A: No, we are not a formal (registered) organization, we are a grassroots parent collective. During this work, we have identified gaps in processes and representation and have been able to leverage our social capital to connect with City leaders and collaborate to further elevate parents' voices.

**Q: DO YOU SUPPORT OUR SFUSD UNIONS?**

A: Yes! Our parent leads come from a background of union membership and some of us even are currently in unions, or have held union leadership positions. Unions exist to ensure the working conditions of their members; this is a great thing. If union leadership can get creative with solutions that will help our school system better serve students during this unique time, that is wonderful. Additionally, just as unions exist to lift up and address the concerns and needs of its members, we do the same for families and their children. We believe that support does not always mean 100% agreement 100% of the time, but are committed to working together. If there were always perfect alignment between all stakeholders, neither unions nor parent groups like ours would need to exist. It's okay that they do, and we've found we share a lot of common ground.

**Q: HOW DO YOU KEEP AN EQUITY FOCUS THROUGHOUT YOUR ADVOCACY WORK?**

A: In short, it's challenging. Individuals have unfairly labeled DtD as entitled white parents...this is what they believe to be true based on either the optics of a Facebook group or a couple individuals who have referenced DtD during public comment. However, if those same individuals would respond to our intentional outreach to engage in a listening session, I think they will find there is more alignment than they realize. Outside of Facebook, DtD have supported Latinx families in the Mission who are creating their own outdoor learning space to best support their children. We have conducted focus groups with Black families who are not comfortable verbally sharing their concerns with SFUSD affiliated groups. We have reached out to CBOs that support Vietnamese families in the Tenderloin and Chinese families who live in SROs in Chinatown. We acknowledge there are pre-existing groups and have done our due diligence reaching out to them when we were organizing. It's clear that there are BIPOC families who are still in the dark around SFUSD's plans and we feel we need to support them. In addition, as a parent collective, we are engaging high school youth and transitional aged youth to ensure their voices are lifted up and centered.